WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY – Founded December 19, 1857 OCTOBER 1977

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Our Katherine Groomes Green Plant sale in September was the most successful to date. Total sales were nearly $400. On behalf of the Society I would like to thank all of the people who helped with the sale and those who contributed plants. Special thanks should go to Lois Foyle, chairman. Our thanks, too, to the people who helped during the two days of the sale: Marion Davis, Dorothy Purdy, Ethelyn Morton, Diane Talley, Rosemary Whelan, Frances Gamble, Else Ordway, Stuart Thayer, Reeva Cranor, Helen Schmutz, Carol Freeman, Edna Koch, Jewel Reynolds, Mary Steffek, Harold Jones, Hazel Proctor and Alice Ziegler. Lois was also successful in getting more florists to contribute plants than ever before. They were Ann Arbor Flower Shop, Chelsea Flower Shop, Petal Shop, Nielsen's, Franks Nurseries (Maple Village and Arborland). We also owe thanks to the Yarn Shop for the yarn for the macrame hangers.

Three stalwarts on our board have had to drop out of active participation over the summer and we will miss them greatly. They are Rosemary Whelan, Stuart Thayer and Dave Pollock. Rosemary did such a great job as Membership Chairman, Dave as a member of the General Museum Committee, and Stuart Thayer as Vice President and Curator. Stuart will continue as Curator but other demands on his time have compelled him to be less active. The Society does appreciate the great contributions these three have made over the past several years.

Thomas F. Lacy

HEAR YE! CHELSEA NAMED FOR CONNECTICUT TOWN

Ralph Muncy, a descendant of one of the founders of Chelsea, has called to our attention that Chelsea, Michigan, was not named for Chelsea, Massachusetts, in spite of what Chapman's History of Washtenaw County says.

The Congdons came from Connecticut. Elisha and Abigail Congdon, parents of Elisha and James who founded the Washtenaw village, lived at Chelsea Landing, often reduced to Chelsea, he said. It was later absorbed into Norwich to the north.

It was at the head of the Thames River and could be reached by sailing ships. The Thames is formed by the junction of the Yantic and Quinebaug Rivers, he noted.

It's been a common misconception here, inadvertently repeated in the September *Impressions*. Muncy has been trying to correct it for years.

REIFF HEADS NEW WCHS FINANCE COMMITTEE

WCHS President Thomas F. Lacy appointed Robert Reiff chairman of a new finance and grants committee.

Others appointed are Hazel Proctor, museum committee; Dan Lirones of Saline, parliamentarian; Wystan Stevens, historian; Jewel Reynolds, refreshments; and Alice Ziegler, editor of *The Impressions.*

PROF. SLOSSON TO SPEAK

Preston W. Slosson, U-M professor emeritus of history, will speak at the November 17 WCHS meeting. The meeting will be a week early because Thanksgiving falls on the usual fourth Thursday.

RETIRED CLERGYMAN WHO KNEW HENRY FORD TO TALK AT OCTOBER 27 MEETING

"The Henry Ford That I Knew" will be Dr. Frank Fitt's topic at the WCHS meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, October 27, in Liberty Hall at Ann Arbor Federal Savings & Loan, Liberty at Division Streets, Ann Arbor.

Dr. Fitt, a retired Presbyterian minister now living in Ann Arbor, was pastor of the Grosse Pointe Memorial Church from 1930-1958. He was a graduate of Williams College and Union Theological Seminary in 1915. He did mission work and served a church in Highland Park, Illinois, before coming to the Detroit area where he met the elder Ford socially. They became good friends in Ford's later years.

HISTORIC BUILDING BOOK MAY BE ORDERED NOW

The Ann Arbor Historic District's new book, *Historic Buildings—Ann Arbor, Michigan*, to be available late this month or next, may be ordered from Ann Arbor Historical Foundation, 312 S. Division St., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104, by sending your name and address and a check for $4.35 to cover taxes and mailing. The book itself is $3.75.

GENEALOGISTS PLAN TO READ A CEMETERY

The Genealogy Group will meet at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, October 23, at Washtenaw Community College. If the weather is good, they will read a nearby cemetery. If not the program will be on "What's Your Problem." A help session will begin at 1 p.m. as usual.

PEOPLE, SHIPS, PLANES VANISH

In 1840 the *Rosalie,* a large French ship bound for Hawaii was found near the Bermuda Triangle. Most of her sails were set, the cargo was intact, everything was shipshape, but the only living thing aboard was a half-starved canary in a cage.

Where did all the people go? This was the first of more than 30 baffling disappearances of people, sea and air craft cited by Robert McNamee, a local retired engineer, at the September WCHS meeting.

Many of the disappearances were in or near an area of the western North Atlantic Ocean known as the Bermuda Triangle. It is defined by drawing a line from Miami, Florida, to Bermuda, from there to Puerto Rico and back to Miami.

In some cases ships were found abandoned. In others ships or planes vanished without a trace of debris, even after massive and exhaustive searches. Electronic communications have been garbled or suddenly lost. One survivor told of sudden extreme turbulence "on a beautiful clear night."

A late night radio talk show he heard in 1966 in Mexico sparked his interest. Although it didn't take place in the Triangle, the loss of his nephew, Major William Page, on a C-135 Air Force jet which disappeared on a Pacific flight in 1971 heightened his interest too.

The Triangle is part of the Sargasso Sea, an elliptical area with masses of brown seaweed, Sargassum bacciferum, the common gulfweed, washed from the coast. It has long had an evil reputation with sailors who feared they might be held fast if they sailed into the weeds.

It is thought possible the Carthaginians reached the Sargasso Sea, spawning ground of the common eel, as early as 530 B.C. Some believe the Lost City of Atlantis, a legendary sunken island west of the Strait of Gibraltar referred to by Plato in 5 B.C., was in this area.

He cited the documented losses:

1. The *Rosalie*. (See first paragraph.)

2. In 1854 the schooner *Bella* disappeared completely without trace.

3. In March 1854, the *City of Glasgow*, en route from Liverpool to Philadelphia, vanished with 450 on board.

4. In March 1866, the Swedish bark *Lotta*, out of Goteborg, bound for Havana, vanished somewhere off the north coast of Haiti.

5. In 1868, the *Viego*, a Spanish merchantman, vanished as did the *Lotta*.

6. In 1870 the *City of Boston*, en route to New York from Liverpool, vanished with 177 on board.

7. On November 5, 1872, the *Mary Celeste*, a brigantine of 280 tons, left New York for Italy. On December 5 the *Del Gratia* came upon her about halfway between the Azores and Portugal with her canvas in disorder. Getting no response, they sent a boarding party and found no one. The log book indicated the *Mary Celeste* had been adrift for eleven days. All small boats were gone, deck ports were tightly sealed, yet there was ample food and water aboard.

8. In January 1880 the British frigate *Atalanta* left Bermuda for England and apparently went down in a storm that arose soon after she left port, but no identifiable debris was ever found after an extensive search.

9. In 1881 a deserted schooner was picked up west of the Azores by the *Ellen Austin* which put a salvage crew aboard. The salvage crew and schooner disappeared en route to Newfoundland.

10. In 1884, the Italian schooner *Miramonde* vanished en route to New Orleans.

11. On March 4, 1918, the 19,500 ton U.S. Navy collier *Cyclops* sailed from Barbados for Norfolk, Virginia. Due March 13, she never arrived. After many months the Navy ended its investigation with this statement:

> "The disappearance of this ship has been one of the most baffling mysteries in the annals of the Navy, all attempts to locate her having been unsuccessful. Many theories have been advanced but none that satisfactorily accounts for her disappearance."

12. In 1921 the *Carol Deering* was found grounded at Diamond Shoals, North Carolina, deserted.

13. In 1923 the *Swift Star* vanished en route from the Panama Canal to the Atlantic.

14. In January 1925 the cargo ship *Cotopaxi* vanished en route from Charleston, North Carolina, to Havana.

15. In March 1926 the freighter *Sudaffeo* sailed south from Port Newark for Puerto Rico into limbo.

16. In October 1931 the Norwegian ship *Stavanger* vanished somewhere south of Cat Island in the Bahamas.

17. In April 1932 the two-masted *John and Mary* of New York registry was found 50 miles south of Bermuda, drifting with sails furled, the hull freshly painted, but not a soul aboard.

18. In March 1938 the *Anglo-Australian* vanished off the Azores with 39 aboard.

19. In February 1940 the yacht *Gloria Colete* of St. Vincent, British West Indies, was found abandoned 200 miles south of Mobile, Alabama, in the Gulf of Mexico.

20. In October 1944 the Cuban freighter *Rubicon* was sighted off

the coast of Florida by a Navy blimp. When a Coast Guard cutter from Miami arrived the only living thing aboard was a dog. A lifeboat was missing and a broken hawser was hanging down from the bow.

21. In late 1944 five of a flight of seven U.S. Air Force bombers headed for Italy were lost near Bermuda. A crew member of one of the surviving planes reported:

> "Not more than 300 miles from Bermuda on a beautiful clear night we were suddenly whipped over on our backs, found ourselves on the ceiling one moment and pinned down the next, as the ship was thrown about at an incredible rate of speed. Our pilot was a 240 pound strong man and our co-pilot was six feet one and weighed 200 pounds. I watched them pulling . . . with all their strength to avert a sure crash into the ocean only a few hundred feet below. They pulled out of the dive close to the water . . . The entire incident took only a matter of seconds . . . we headed back to Bermuda . . ."

22. On December 5, 1945, five U.S. Navy torpedo bombers, TBM "Avengers" and a Martin Mariner Flying Boat vanished off the coast of Florida. This is the most famous of all the unexplained disappearances in the area, he said.

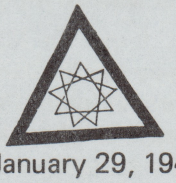
McNamee quoted from an account of it in *Invisible Residents* by Ivan Sanderson:

> ". . . They were airborne at 2 p.m. . . . The first radioed communication from the lead plane did not come in to base until 3:35 p.m.— and curiously, this did not request landing instructions but instead reported: 'Calling tower, this is an emergency . . . We seem to be off course . . . We cannot see land . . . Asked by the tower for their position the astonishing reply came back: 'We're not sure of our position . . . Advised by the tower to head due west, the even more astonishing reply came back: 'We don't know which way is west. Everything is wrong . . . strange. We can't be sure of any direction. Even the ocean doesn't look as it should.'"

The account says the flight leader, apparently in panic, turned over command to another pilot who radioed at 4:25 p.m., "We don't know where we are. We think we must be about 225 miles northeast of base . . ." That was the last heard from them.

Within minutes a Martin Mariner Flying Boat, equipped for rescue missions, headed for the last assumed position of the Avenger flight. It kept in contact with the tower for some fifteen minutes, then when called back, it did not reply.

23. In 1947 an American Superfortress vanished 100 miles off Bermuda.



24. On January 29, 1948, a four-engined Tudor IV, the *Star Tiger*, owned by British-South American Airways vanished. Its last message said it was about 400 miles northeast of Bermuda, and all was well.

25. On December 28, 1948, a DC-3 operated by Airborne Transport, Inc., was chartered for a pre-dawn flight from San Juan, Puerto Rico, to Miami. About 50 miles south of Miami the pilot reported all well and asked for landing instructions. That was the last heard.

26. On January 17, 1949, the *Ariel*, sister plane of the *Star Tiger*, vanished in thin air. Leaving Bermuda at 7:45 a.m., their only radio message came at 8:25 a.m. saying that they were 180 miles south of Bermuda in fair weather and about to call Kingston.

After a massive search there was only one possible clue. Before dawn on January 18, a U.S. bomber and a British B.O.A.C. plane reported seeing a strange light about 300 miles south of Bermuda. A search there found nothing. (Columbus reported an "enigmatic light" near San Salvador in 1492.)

27. In June 1950 a freighter, the S. S. *Sauda* sailed from Savannah, Georgia, for Puerte Cabello, Venezuela. She disappeared in peaceful weather off the Florida coast.

28. On February 2, 1953, a British York transport vanished over the Atlantic on a trooping flight to Jamaica. Its S.O.S. ended abruptly. A London court of inquiry reported "cause unascertainable."

29. In October 1954 a U.S. Navy Super Constellation disappeared.

30. In September 1955, the yacht *Connemara* was found abandoned 400 miles west of Bermuda.

31. On November 9, 1956, a U.S. Navy patrol bomber flew into oblivion near Bermuda.

32. On January 8, 1962, a U.S. Air Force KB-50 tanker left Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, and headed east for the Azores. Soon after Langley received weak garbled radio signals indicating trouble before they faded.

33. In April 1962, a private twin-engined plane approaching Nassau, the Bahamas, called for directions but could not give its own position. Then contact broke off. Later parts of one wing were found floating 20 miles offshore where the pilot should have been able to see land.

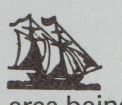
34. On February 2, 1963, the tanker ship *Marine Sulphur Queen* left Beaumont, Texas, for Norfolk, Virginia. February 16, some debris and a life jacket, believed to be from the tanker, were found in the Florida Straits, 14 miles southeast of Key West.

35. On April 10, 1963, the atom-powered U.S. Navy submarine *Thresher* sank in the

Atlantic on a deep power dive. All 129 men aboard were killed.

36. On August 28, 1963, two KC-135 four-engine Strato-tanker jets left Homestead Air Force Base, Florida, on a classified refueling mission. They vanished in clear weather. They were last reported 300 miles west of Bermuda. Debris was found floating 260 miles southwest of Bermuda and more debris 160 miles from the first discovery.

37. In May 1968 the U.S. Navy nuclear submarine *Scorpion* sank 450 miles southwest of the Azores, cause unknown. She was found October 30, 1968, and photographs taken showed the hull had been crushed.



Despite the area being heavily traveled and patrolled, it has been the location of more sea and air vanishments than could be expected by chance, McNamee believes.

Modern man, seeking to explain such occurrences, has had little success. Some have speculated on such things as geo-magnetic variations, electro-magnetic aberrations, gravitational aberrations, enigmatic ellipses, unidentified flying objects (UFO's), other intelligences and even UAO's, unidentified aquatic objects from an underwater civilization. He left it to the audience to judge for themselves.

LYDIA MUNCY CHAIRMAN OF GENEALOGY GROUP

The Genealogy Group elected Lydia Muncy of Ann Arbor chairman for the coming year. Grover Mellin of Brighton is vice-chairman, Mary Lou Berry of Ann Arbor, secretary, and Flora Burt of Chelsea, treasurer. Polly Bender is librarian. Named to the board were Harold Jones and Margaret Sias, both of Chelsea; Marguerite Lambert and Dr. and Mrs. William F. Bender, all of Ann Arbor.

DEXTER SOCIETY ELECTS FUSILIER PRESIDENT

Wallace Fusilier is the new president of the Dexter Historical Society. Other officers are Earl Doletzky, vice-president; Wana Baldus, treasurer; Kathleen Adair, corresponding secretary; and Heloise Dunstan, recording secretary. Sarah Frank is assistant director of the museum and Bene Fusilier, secretary.

SALEM HISTORICAL SOCIETY HEADED BY ELSIE MANSON

Vice-President Elsie Manson is now serving as president of the Salem Historical Society since President Doris Gillihan and her family moved to Tennessee this summer. Irene Lyke is secretary and Annie Wessel is treasurer.

The group plans to meet every other month. Their first event was a potluck supper October 13.

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

Chelsea Historical Society—Oral history interviews with some older local residents will be played at the next meeting at 8 p.m. Monday, November 14, in McKune Library. No October meeting.

Dexter Historical Society—The Society is presently concentrating on improvements at the museum. Current projects include waterproofing the museum foundation so the basement can be used for storage and landscaping the grounds. Plans for the latter are being drawn up by a member who is a landscape architect.

Milan Historical Society—Meets regularly on third Wednesday of month at 7:30 p.m. at Milan Community House.

Manchester Historical Society—8 p.m. Monday, October 24, at Methodist Church. The newly organized society plans a membership drive. Thanks to an interested citizen it will have the old Neibling blacksmith shop on Main Street to restore as a museum.

NORMAN BLACKIE HEADS SALINE AREA SOCIETY

Norman Blackie is the new president of Saline Historical Society. Marjorie Shelton is vice-president, Joan Merrell, secretary, and Dick Coleman, treasurer.

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Washtenaw Historical Society Meeting

THURSDAY

8:00 P.M.

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OCTOBER 27, 1977

Miss Eileen Harrison
322 E. Cross Street
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